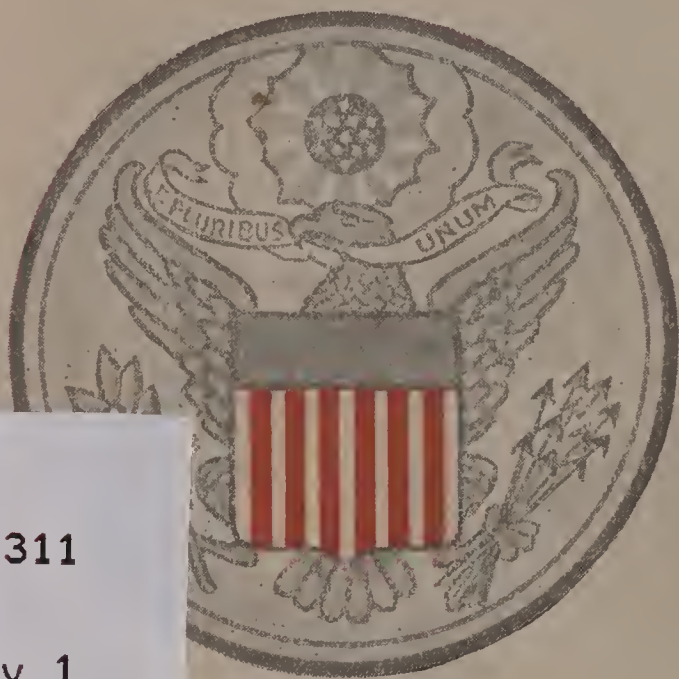


The Ancestry
of the
American Dollar



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THE ANCESTRY
OF THE
AMERICAN DOLLAR

and the origin of
the *Dollar Sign*



COMPLIMENTS OF
THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK
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was a person of much importance, and there he operated a private mint in which he struck coins of such uniform goodness as to weight and fineness that they quickly acquired a widespread popularity at a time when unreliability was the chief characteristic of government coinage. The early issues of this piece first struck in 1486 went under the name of Guldengroschen, and were the first silver coins to be made in this large size, approximating closely that of the present American dollar.

Later issues of Schlick's money were called Schlickenthalers or Joachimsthalers, the first name indicating that they were made

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in a thal or dale by one Schlick, and the second, that they were issued in the Thal of St. Joachim. These names were too lengthy and cumbersome when speaking of an object so often talked about as money, so the first portion was dropped, shortly, and the coins were referred to simply as "thalers."

From thaler to daler and later to dollar was an easy verbal transition when these pieces began to pass through the hands of English-speaking people, and "dollar" had already become an English word when Shakespeare was writing his plays, although the English made no coin called by that name.

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Variations of the word thaler made their appearance in other European languages as appreciation of the new coinage grew, and it was not many years before Spain issued an imitative piece destined to have a world-wide distribution under the name of the Spanish dollar or peso.

In the sixteenth century Spain was the richest and most powerful State in Europe, controlling not only the fortunes of Italy and the wealthy provinces of the Netherlands, but having a monopoly of commerce with the newly discovered countries in North and South America with their vast treasures of silver and gold.

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After the conquest of Mexico and of Peru, Spanish-American mints were established in the different colonies throughout the Spanish possessions, and such quantities of Spanish dollars were coined and circulated that before the close of the sixteenth century they were current even as far as China and the Philippines.

In the English colonies of North America their use was so general during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that when the fathers of this republic were discussing the establishment of an American mint and an American coinage, the Spanish dollar, or "piece of eight," had

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almost unrivalled consideration as a model for the new monetary unit.

Thomas Jefferson, speaking on this subject at that time, referred to the dollar of Spain as “a known coin and the most familiar of all to the minds of the people.” And thus it was that legislation merely made legal a condition that already obtained; for the American dollar derived its name, value and weight from the Spanish dollar. Not only was the dollar established by act of Congress, Aug. 8, 1786, as the unit of the new American coinage, but by the same act the United Colonies threw off the troublesome sys-

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tem of shillings, pence, farthings, *et cetera*, under which their reckoning formerly had been done, and instituted the decimal subdivision into dimes (at first written dismes), cents and mills. Moreover, the Spanish dollar, or "piece of eight," was subdivided into eight reals each valued at $\$0.12\frac{1}{2}$ and called "ninepence" in New England and Virginia, "shilling" in New York, "levy" in Pennsylvania and "bit" in the west and southwest.

So involved was the business of the country in these ancient and confusing methods of reckoning that it was nearly a century from its establishment before it

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could be said that the new decimal system was in complete possession of the field. But when its use finally became general its advantage was clearly apparent.

At the present time the same dollar value is standard in the United States, Canada, British Honduras, Colombia and Panama, while other American republics have gold units differing in value so slightly from the United States dollar that to bring them to our standard would create very slight embarrassment.

The peso of Argentina is worth \$0.96 $\frac{1}{2}$, the gold gourde of Haiti, \$0.96 $\frac{1}{2}$, the peso of Uruguay is



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valued at $\$1.03\frac{1}{2}$, the peso of Venezuela at $\$0.96\frac{1}{2}$, the gold peso of Cuba at $\$0.92\frac{1}{2}$; Newfoundland has a dollar worth about $\$1.01\frac{1}{2}$. In the rix-daler of Holland, valued at $\$0.98\frac{1}{4}$ United States coining rate, and the talari of Abyssinia, $\$0.97\frac{1}{5}$ United States coining rate, can plainly be seen the derivation from the ancient "thaler" of Count Schlick.

Take it all the world over, the American dollar has many cousins or near cousins, and it requires no great stretch of the imagination, in view of recent efforts for the promotion of Pan-American acquaintance, to see a future time when the dollar of

the United States will furnish the monetary standard for the entire Western hemisphere.

American dollars have performed such good service in raising these United States to a leading place among the nations that, according to Voltaire's aphorism, they have "no need of ancestors." But as a creditable family tree does exist, a justifiable pride in the ancestry of the dollar he earns and spends is a part of every American's birth-right.

THE
 O R I G I N 
OF THE
D O L L A R S I G N

For many years curiosity has been aroused from time to time concerning the origin of this little mark whose magic can give to nameless numbers the proud title of dollars. But until recently only conjecture has furnished an answer.

Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, Robert Morris and the others, through whose sagac-

ity and executive ability our present monetary system and Treasury Department came into existence, were too busy doing things to spend much time in recording explanations of how and why they did them. For this reason many interesting details connected with the beginnings of our nation in its Department of Finance are lost beyond recall, while others can be ascertained only as the result of much patient investigation.

There is no authentic record known that fixes the derivation of this mark or that mentions it as having been introduced or proposed to Congress for adoption by any person. Many su-

THE DOLLAR SIGN

perfcial suggestions have been made regarding the source from which we received it, and some competent persons have considered the matter seriously and painstakingly and have contributed interesting and valuable facts to the discussion. Prominent among the latter class is Prof. Florian Cajori of Colorado College, in the course of whose researches several cities have been visited and many letters, documents and books, both English and Spanish, carefully examined and compared.

In a systematic effort to discover the real origin of this sign, one should first take into account the fact that the Spanish dollar

was the immediate predecessor of the American dollar, and also that the two coins were in common use by our people at the same time. This has led many to jump immediately at the conclusion that the mark was an attempt to represent the figure 8 that appeared on the Spanish coin to indicate its division into 8 reals, but no evidence has ever been brought forward to support this view and there would seem to be no adequate reason for emphasizing this subdivision into reals.

Some have contended that the dollar mark was a simplified representation of the "Pillars of Hercules" seen on the Span-

ish dollar of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These pillars, in a conventionalized form, were much employed in Spanish decoration, as their position (one on Spanish soil and one on the African coast) brought them much into the public eye. Their origin, also, was such as would make a strong appeal for recognition.

On one of Hercules' adventurous expeditions he playfully installed the two rocky promontories, still standing, one on either side of the Straits of Gibraltar where the Mediterranean opens upon the Atlantic Ocean; the ancients applied to this western portion of the Span-

ish coast the expression "*ne plus ultra*" in the supposition that there was "no more beyond."

When America was discovered and the precious metal pillaged from the unfortunate aborigines was coined into dollars for the benefit of Spain, it was thought peculiarly fitting to place upon them a symbolical representation of the "Pillars of Hercules" entwined with a ribbon bearing the revised legend "*plus ultra*" ("more beyond"). One form of the design on these "pillar dollars" will be seen on page 1 of this book.

However, as the suggestion is purely fanciful, and as no commercial documents or letters ex-

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ist in which this design is copied, it becomes necessary to reject it. But the true answer to this problem seems to be found in letters and business papers recently brought to light in which the transition is shown from the old abbreviation "P. S." for pesos (Spanish dollars) to "\$," the American dollar sign. A letter written in 1792 by Robert Morris, the financier of the revolution, contains the earliest known pen-made dollar mark, and it is formed with only one downward stroke through the "S," which is true of other dollar signs made both by Morris and by his secretary in various other documents. After its use had

actually commenced, the dollar sign was made sparingly.

In colonial days, and even far into the nineteenth century, it was common both in writing and printing to use the abbreviations "dolls.," "doll.," "do.," "ds.," and "d." The sign, "\$," did not spring suddenly into use, even in printing, but was a matter of gradual growth.

The Spanish write or print the abbreviation "P. S." for pesos after the figures, but the English colonists, having been accustomed to place the sign "£" for pounds at the left of the figures, put there the sign for pesos, when using Spanish dollars, and later the dollar mark, and that

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is why we place it there to-day.

In Argentina it is customary to write the dollar sign as well as the peso sign at the right of the figures in this way — 50\$. The evidence is very conclusive that the effort by English-speaking people to write a simple form of “P. S.” at the left of figures representing dollars gradually evolved the present sign. A tendency in this direction is apparent some years before an American dollar existed and when Americans were using the Spanish dollar alone.

An extremely interesting letter containing a statement of an account and showing on the same

ORIGIN OF THE DOLLAR SIGN

page the sign "P. S." formed by one stroke of the pen and also a dollar sign was brought to light by Professor Cajori in the Wisconsin Historical Library at Madison. It was written by Oliver Pollock in 1778 when he was holding the position of commercial agent of the United States at New Orleans. The regular dollar sign as we use it to-day is rarely found in writing before the year 1800. An American arithmetic, Chauncey Lee's "American Accomptant," published at Lansingburgh in 1797, contains the earliest known instance of the dollar mark in print.

*Refer some authority,
50-115*

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Condensed Statement of the Condition
of
THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK
OF BOSTON

Federal, Franklin and Congress Streets

As made to the Comptroller under date of
August 9th, 1913

RESOURCES

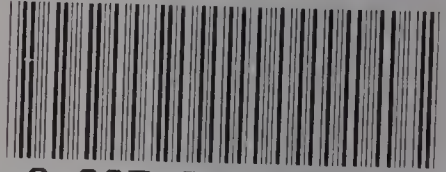
Notes Discounted	-	-	-	\$38,387,440 29
United States Bonds to secure Circulation	-	-	-	2,000,000 00
U. S. and other Bonds to secure U. S. Deposits	-	-	-	480,667 50
Bonds, Securities, etc.	-	-	-	4,544,630 49
Due from U. S. Treasurer, 5% Fund	-	-	-	100,000 00
Banking House	-	-	-	1,500,000 00
Demand Loan	\$14,488,537	68		
Cash and Due from Banks	30,670,723	05		
				<u>45,159,260 73</u>
				<u>\$92,171,999 01</u>

LIABILITIES

Capital Stock	-	-	-	\$5,000,000 00
Surplus and Undivided Profits	-			11,249,887 41
National Bank Notes outstanding				2,000,000 00
Bond Account	-	-	-	500,000 00
Deposits	-	-	-	73,422,111 60
				<u>\$92,171,999 01</u>

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